

WARFARE

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solidarity (ceremonial), is partly responsible for the solid foundation of the kinship structure in Murngin society. Warfare also helps to prevent the breaking of tribal laws by the threat of retaliation from other social groups. Finally, it acts as the ultimate police power in the functioning of Murngin society. It is the threat of its force which ultimately prevents flagrant breaking of tribal taboos.

CAUSES OF WAR

Of seventy-two recorded battles of the last twenty years in which members of Murngin factions were killed, fifty were for blood revenge—the desire to avenge the killing of a relative, usually a clansman, by members of another clan. Of these, fifteen were deliberate killings, against the tradition of what is fair cause for a war, and because it was felt that the enemies had killed the wrong people. Ten killings were due to stealing or obtaining by illegal means a woman who belonged to another clan. Five supposedly guilty magicians were killed by the clan members of victims of black magic. Five men were slain for looking at a totemic emblem under improper circumstances and thereby insulting the owning clan and endangering the clan's spiritual strength.

The idea underlying most Murngin warfare is that the same injury should be inflicted upon the enemy group that one's own group has suffered. This accomplished, a clan feels satisfied; otherwise, there is a constant compulsion toward vengeance, causing a continuous restlessness among those who are out to "buy back" the killing of one of their clansmen. The stealing of a woman provokes the same spirit, since the group feels itself injured; and only the return of the woman and a ceremonial fight, or the stealing of another woman, will satisfy the hurt to its self-esteem, unless the clan has retaliated by killing or wounding one of the enemy clansmen. The same feeling is instigated by the improper viewing of the totem—an insult and an injury to the entire clan.

Any of the above causes for war may be given deliberately or by accident, but in either case warfare is a certain consequence. If a young man chances upon an old man engaged in making a totemic emblem, the former is killed; or if a man is accidentally killed in a fight by a member of a friendly group, the dead man's people retaliate. There is, nevertheless, considerable feeling that an accident should not cause open hostilities, but it has small influence upon the public opinion of those who believe themselves injured.

There are a number of forms of ritualistic injury. If women look

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688 at a totemic emblem they are killed by their own group, with the help
 672 of any other group that has been offended by their actions. The clan
 to which they belong is not held responsible except in a minor way. Some years ago the Liagaomir clan was holding a totemic ceremony, using its carpet snake totemic emblems (painted wooden trumpets). Two women stole up to the ceremonial ground and watched the men blowing the trumpet, went back to the women's camp and told them what they had seen. When the men came back to camp and heard of their behavior, Yanindja, the leader, said, "When will we kill them?" [696] Everyone replied, "Immediately."

The two women were instantly put to death by members of their own clan with the help of the men from the other group.

Maritja, one of the most conventional men in the society, was making a shark totemic emblem. He had hidden it in a hollow tree near the border of the men's ceremonial grounds. Some women belonging to the visiting Burera tribe had walked near it. This had been established by the identification of their footprints by Maritja and his brothers. Maritja went down to the Burera camp and said to the assembled group, "You all know I never make trouble unless there is very good cause for it. You know I look for peace, but your women have done my people a great wrong. They have walked near the place where I had my totem hidden. I shall be sick and maybe I'll die."

The Burera men said, "You are right. If they have done this you may kill them if you wish." Nothing further was done since it was not considered a very great wrong; but had the women actually looked at his totemic emblem he could have killed them, and their clan would not have retaliated.

688 Munyirir's wife was burning a patch of brush while hunting for bandicoot. The husband had hidden the string for his totemic emblem in the bushes. The fire destroyed it. The string belonged to the Daiuror clan. They tried to kill her and would have succeeded, but she escaped to the mission with the help of her husband. He was felt to have done wrong in helping her.

A young Warumeri clansman illicitly viewed a stone totemic emblem that is situated on Elcho Island. The men of the clan followed his footsteps and saw what he had done. When they caught him they immediately killed him.

A Mandelpui boy came upon two old Liagaomir men making a totemic emblem. When they saw him they said, "Come look," and with smiles and gestures indicated their approval of his having a closer

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765 of the man's personal basket. A piece of a spear that has been broken
628 off and left in the body of the victim is also used as a relic. When a
man has been wounded he sometimes soaks pieces of paper bark in
his blood and presents them to his relatives to be used as reminders
of their duty to compensate him for his injury by helping him kill
or wound a member of the offending man's clan. When a man obtains
one of the relics, it is an almost absolute demand on him to kill a
member of the slayer's group. This is particularly true if it is given to
a young man. The older men usually give their relics to the younger
males.

765 The spirit of the dead is supposed to go with the relic, and the relic
778 has magic power. It can be thrown into an intended victim's fire and
789 cause him to go to sleep, or the possessor can blow his breath against
it and produce the same effect. It is often carried in the mouth during
a battle to make an opponent tired and heavy-footed and to prevent
him from dodging spears. Relics play a prominent part in all feuds.

682 Occasionally men are killed within the clan, but this is not a cause
for war or retaliation by members of the clan or by near relatives from
without the clan. A man may be such a notorious killer and cause so
much trouble for his own clansmen that the entire group will kill
him to stop further disturbances. At times men are slain by their own
clan for breaking ceremonial taboos, such as divulging secrets of the
old men to the women or the uninitiated, and for viewing ceremonial
objects before their initiation.

672 If a fight is on and a near relative is accidentally hit by a club or
576 spear, the person responsible hits himself on the head while saying he
is sorry. Here, too, the underlying idea is to inflict an injury on the
responsible person similar to the one the injured party suffered.

152 Military honor also contributes its share to the causes for war. A man
will brave the spears of a whole clan to demonstrate his fearlessness.

577 The writer has seen two brothers defy fifteen men in a spear fight.
The Murngin people are a brave and courageous group. Fear of death
while in a fight is seldom seen. A man who shows an unwillingness
to fight is called a woman and held in extreme contempt.

628 The fundamental principle underlying all the causes of Murngin
681 warfare is that of reciprocity: if a harm has been done to an individual
181 or a group, it is felt by the injured people that they must repay the
ones who have harmed them by an injury that at least equals the one
they have suffered. When the total cultural situation of Murngin life is
181 further examined, this negative reciprocation is found to fit into a

628 of time and finally, tired of having it in his possession, presented it to
 765 Bengaliwe (Djirin clan). He said, "This comes from Drona and Parpar. You can do something about this, for I am tired." Time passed and Bengaliwe also lost interest in the relic. The killing had occurred so long before the time of his possession that it did not have great emotional interest for him. He even considered throwing it away, but it still remained in his personal basket. One day Balliman (Djirin clan) looked into his relative's basket. He saw the relic wrapped in the fiber string and, since he was still a very young man, his curiosity was aroused to the point of his asking Bengaliwe what it meant. Bengaliwe said, "That belongs to you people. It comes from Parpar's brother." Since the Naladaer and Djirin clansmen are considered more or less one people, for the Naladaer has a very undifferentiated existence from the Djirin, the statement of Bengaliwe was true.

Balliman's interest was aroused. He was a natural fighter, and always keen on organizing an expedition to fight someone, no matter what the cause. He went to his near brother, a member of the Djirin clan, Maiangula, and said, "I have something here for you. It is an old gatu [son]. It belongs to us. The spear that killed him is in Bengaliwe's basket." Maiangula, a large man of a more or less even temperament, said, "What do you think we had better do? Do you think we ought to steal it away from Bengaliwe? He can't go fight them for that. His people are too near relatives to them for him to fight Parpar and Drona. They are like one people."

Maiangula then went to see Bengaliwe and was given the relic.

628 Maiangula had been a small boy when his father was killed, so he
 had done nothing at the time to avenge his father's death. About three years before he received the relic from Bengaliwe and about two years after the killing of Ginda, the Naladaer, Waltjimi, the war leader of the Daiuror group, who was Maiangula's father-in-law, said to the young man, "You have a spear head, Maiangula, that was found in the body of Ginda when we painted his body with red ocher and took it from the tree. He was my waku [son-in-law]. You go kill Parpar and Drona and I will give you one of my daughters for a present to become your wife."

628 After a conference, Maritja, the leader of the Djirin, agreed to head the
 672 party. He agreed to go on the expedition only after he had stipulated that Parpar and Drona be the only two men killed, since they were such notorious killers that there was a general feeling among the older men throughout north Arnhem Land that the clan to which the two belonged should not be held responsible for their behavior. This feeling, however, became uppermost in the minds of the old men only at those times when they were most philosophical and there had been no recent slaying, for during their more emotional states they felt that the whole clan should be destroyed. Maiangula and the younger men, although agreeing to this

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consideration of Maritja, were out to kill for blood vengeance and did not concern themselves with whether to kill Parpar and Drona or other members of their clan. In the war party which left in search of Parpar and Drona were Maritja (Djirin), Balliman (Djirin), Maiangula (Djirin), Djowa (Daiuror), Berundais (Naladaer), as well as many other members of the three clans. The first two were actual brothers, and the third a classificatory brother of the first two, since his father was a brother of their father. Djowa was a son of Waltjimi's older brother. 628
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Narnarngo, a Liaguomir clansman who had reared Parpar when the latter's father's father died, heard of the expedition and dispatched Kamata^{*} and Gurnboko, the first a Bringel and the second a Giwiyula, to warn Parpar of his danger. They joined the camp where the others were staying. The information spread among the war party that these new people were going to warn Parpar. The younger men immediately decided among themselves to give up the expedition and kill Kamata and Gurnboko. The leader, Maritja, a much older man than the others, attempted to prevent this but failed.

Maiangula, the leader of the younger men, said, "Narnarngo, who knows all the news, talks too much; he has found out we are going to kill Parpar and Drona. Parpar is a 'son' of Narnarngo. These two men here we can kill now. They are close enough relatives to those others for us to kill them even though they are a little bit 'far off' in their relationship. Because they are a little far, we will not tell Maritja. He is an old man and understands too much, and he will know that we are doing something a little bit wrong. I cannot think that way in my head; I think too much about my father. This young man is a brother that belongs to Parpar; he is close enough."

Maritja knew from the behavior of the younger men that they were plotting the death of the two young men. He said, "I have lived a long time. I saw the old men and the way they acted before you young men were born. I have seen them grow very quiet and their bodies look like they were dead when they were filled inside with a desire to fight. I have seen myself that way. It is better that we go back to our camp. If we stay here you will kill somebody who is not a close enough relative to Parpar and Drona, who killed our relatives."

He warned the prospective victims of their danger and asked them to leave immediately, but they were too young fully to believe him. When it was dusk, the three young men, Maiangula, Balliman and Berundais, formed a camp by themselves against the old men's protests. It was behind a large pandanus palm tree, about eight or ten feet away from the others. Maritja, to make sure that no harm would fall upon the young Giwiyula 628

^{*} This younger Kamata must not be confused with the first one who was killed in the earlier part of the history here related.

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since he believed that it was Berundais who had given Maiangula the relic. He struck Berundais on the head with a club. Maritja, although a very near relative of Berundais, commanded his people not to fight Raiola because he had a right to attack them, since one of his relatives had been slain. Dimala was then attacked by Raiola because he was a brother-in-law of Maiangula's. They fought with knives, but because of the intervention of their mutual friends and relatives, neither of them was hurt. Maiangula and the killers meanwhile had hidden in the bush. 628

After things had quieted and the general camp brawl which had resulted from the slaying had ceased, the inevitable series of discussions commenced among the various old men who had gathered from the clans to determine just what was back of the killing and to attempt to find out if anyone had "pushed" the younger men. The opinions were very divergent upon the actual motivation, but it was felt by all that Maiangula had killed a man who was too far removed from his real enemies, Parpar and Drona. There was also a secondary sentiment that Maiangula's father had been too long dead for Maiangula to retaliate. It was also believed by most of the men that some older man, probably Waltjimi, had directed him to kill the boy, for Waltjimi was a bitter enemy of the Bringel clan. The wounding of the younger man was not so severely criticized, for he was near enough in relationship to Parpar. The chief fault found with his wounding was that he was too young, so that even this attempt to avenge his father's death was held against Maiangula. 628
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After a week or more, when Raiola with his relatives had gone back into the interior to their clan's territory and the general excitement had died down considerably, it was decided to send a messenger from the camp of the Djirin and Naladaer peoples to the Gwiwula to discover what their feelings were about the matter and to attempt to arrange a makarata to settle matters. Birindjaoi was chosen to go because it was thought he would not be hurt by the other side, since he had near relatives among them.* Baerwit, the recognized leader of the Ritarngo clans, was the unofficial head of the group of clansmen who had gathered by a small lake in the interior country. Birindjaoi met Raiola, who was his friend. All of the men's bodies were painted with white clay to show that they were on the warpath. He and Raiola went over to the part of the camp where the Ritarngo were situated. They took tobacco and food to Baerwit. He invited them to sit down. Birindjaoi, who distrusted Baerwit, said that he preferred to stand. Three of the young Ritarngo were standing with their spears ready to throw them. They were all blood sons of Baerwit. 628

The older leader picked up a paper-bark water basin and invited the messenger to have a drink of fresh water. The latter realized it was

* He was identified also with the Crocodile Island mission.

BERNDT]

"Murngin" (Wulamba) Social Organization

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legal institutions found in the society—and this is a function of political organization." The more we consider the question of lineage structure, the less we are willing to classify the corporate descent group of Wulamba type as a lineage. There are, however, striking similarities. For example, writes Fortes (1953:26), "where the lineage is found as a corporate group all the members of a lineage are to outsiders jurally equal and represent the lineage when they exercise legal and political rights and duties in relation to society at large." Thus among the Wulamba the corporate descent group, the *babaru*, will be viewed, in toto, by different outsiders as a *maribula*, a *gadjivulgurabula*, *wagubula*, *gandibula*, *gudarabula*, and so on, depending on what type of relative is found there. "My mother comes from there," or "My sister's son comes from there" thus those people are "my *gandibula*" or "my *wagubula*." All the people within that group will be conveniently classified as "those of my *gandibula*" and so on; all are equally classed with "my mother" or "sister's son," as the case may be, although terminological differences between certain individuals within the group are recognized. But all are held responsible for the actions of any individual within. There is thus a collective responsibility in blood vengeance and in feud, or in running the gauntlet in a *magarada* "peace ceremony." This is thus a function of the Wulamba descent group, as well as, apparently, of the lineage (p. 26).

However, an aspect which demarcates the Wulamba descent group from the lineage is the latter's presumed perpetuity in time. Fortes (p. 27) discusses its continuity, which means its perpetual structural existence—the perpetuation of defined rights, duties, offices, social tasks, and so on, vested in the lineage as a corporate unit. Among the Wulamba, as we have seen, genealogical memory is short. The greatest span of any descent line is five to six generations. But segmentation occurs at any point, so that a number of parallel descent groups are ranged to form a linguistic group, and genealogical connections between them may not always be accurately stipulated. Nevertheless, within the range of the parallel descent groups we find the perpetuation of defined rights which will be primarily of a ritual order, and relating to rights over patterns and emblems, dances, songs, myth sections, and so on; also rights to hunt a particular natural species; rights to make certain kinds of bags; and, sometimes, but rarely, specified tasks like canoe-making, or prerogatives concerning stone-ax and stone-blade quarries, deposits of ochre, and so on. This again raises some interesting questions, highly relevant to our concept of lineage and descent group alike.

It is true, too, as Fortes has mentioned (p. 29) that the descent group must be studied as a part of the total social system. He considers that the main methodological contribution to such studies has been the approach from the angle of political organization (p. 30). Whether this can be done for the Wulamba descent groups remains to be seen. Or again, that descent is fundamentally a jural concept (Radcliffe-Brown 1952): we see, says Fortes (1953:30), "its significance, as the connecting link between the external, that is political and legal, aspect of what we have called unilineal descent groups,

 THE ABORIGINES OF EAST ARNHAM LAND

Marriage and Relationship

578 In the social life of the people polygamy is generally
 595 practised, some men having as many as eight wives. While a
 good deal may be said in justification of this practice among a
 nomadic people, such as these aborigines are, it is a very fruitful
 cause of trouble and strife. This is occasioned by the jealousy
 which older wives frequently feel toward their younger tribal
 [589] sisters, and also by the fact that, because of this system, many
 young men of marriageable age are unable to obtain partners.
 This latter fact, not unnaturally, leads to the stealing of women
 and general breaches of the moral laws of the tribe.

562 One, to us, highly unjust custom is to punish a woman who
 627 has been stolen, even though she has been taken away by force,
 672 much more severely than the man who has stolen her. In most
 684 cases she is, when recovered, badly speared or beaten, in some
 cases so severely treated as to be killed, while the man who has
 taken her, unless he occupy a prohibited relationship to the
 woman, is usually let off with a severe lecturing.

627 Generally all the relatives of the wronged husband who are
 684 present will join in this brutal chastisement of the woman, their
 action being justified by the fact that they "feel sorry" for their
 fellow-tribesman. Perhaps experience has proved the value of
 this method of controlling domestic relationships.

582 Marriage, as previously indicated, is regulated by the social
 584 organisation of the tribe. There are only certain men of the
 opposite moiety who are eligible to become the husband of any
 particular girl or woman. To one of these men the girl is given
 in infancy, and, though this man has nothing directly to do with
 her until she reaches the age of puberty, he is required, during the
 years of her infancy and girlhood, to fulfil certain obligations,
 such as the making of presents of food, weapons or utensils, to her
 father.

[585] Because of this custom, there is nothing approaching a
 ceremony of marriage among these people, the girl during infancy
 as really belonging to the man as she will later on when he actually
 takes her to wife. When a man dies, his wife or wives immediately
 587 pass over to one or more of his tribal brothers, so that, excepting
 768 in the case of a few very old women, there are no widows, and
 there are no orphans in this aboriginal community.

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Character, Arts and Crafts

Personal Character.

152 In personal character these aborigines are light-hearted and
 522 happy, with a great fondness for practical joking. Anything
 which places another in a position of discomfiture is hugely
 enjoyed. They are quick and rather violent tempered, but on the
 whole their temper is shortlived.

152 A comparatively trifling offence will quickly result in a general
 579 disturbance, in which both sexes engage, and during which weapons
 are brandished and an amazing amount of mutual abuse is
 indulged in, but usually little serious damage is done, and, having
 talked themselves out, life soon returns to its normal course.

157 As might be expected, there are some few individuals of a
 more sullen and anti-social type who become notorious as trouble-
 makers, and who constitute a difficult problem for their own
 people. The outstanding weakness of the aborigine's character is
 his want of a sense of personal responsibility. Rarely does a
 man act on his own initiative or assume and maintain an individual
 attitude in regard to any matter.

[157] This is undoubtedly accounted for by the fact that in the
 [182] aboriginal community the unit is not the individual, but the
 614 tribal horde. The tribe or group stands or falls together. Every
 672 member of it shares in the honour or disgrace of any one of its
 number. An offence by one member is regarded by another
 tribe or division as an offence by the whole of the offender's
 division. All are held as being equally guilty.

614 In such serious offences as occasion the shedding of blood,
 628 the members of the injured tribe or division make no special
 672 attempt to avenge themselves upon the individual who has actually
 committed the offence, but are as well satisfied if they succeed
 in punishing any member of the party to which he belongs.
 Though the tribe as a whole may strongly disapprove of the
 action of one of their number, by which action hostility has been
 created between them and another tribe, they, knowing they are
 all involved, must nevertheless stand behind this particular
 individual.

182 In this way is the individual relieved of the responsibility of
 157 his own actions, and does not personally realise their results
 614
 [672] EITHER FOR GOOD OR ILL.

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753 fire, and, as the smoke ascended, he asked it to carry this coughing
754 sickness to these people.

754 In this aboriginal community are men known as Gulung, or
756 "Marrngit," who exercise magic in a curative or preventive way.
Their chief function is to discover and combat the sinister purposes
of the Ragalk, or of evil spirits. Neither the Ragalk nor the
Marrngit occupy a position apart from the ordinary life of the
people, nor do they exercise any special functions in the ceremonial
life of the tribe.

6281 Magic is also believed to operate through an article known
765 as "Maiyabala." When a man dies or is killed, a scrap of one of
778 his bones, or a piece of one of his weapons or utensils, is given by
one of his near relatives to each of his friends. This article is
known as a "Maiyabala," and carries with it this important signifi-
cance. Every man accepting the "Maiyabala" places himself under
the obligation of doing his best to avenge the death of the
deceased. I have known men who have allowed themselves to be
persuaded into accepting the "Maiyabala," to be later deeply
troubled when they have considered the probable consequences
of their action. There is no way of escaping the obligation, and
these men have thus made themselves party to a serious quarrel
which probably does not concern them.

672 When a man, in fulfilment of this obligation, kills another, he
765 is usually relieved from personal responsibility in the matter, the
778 magical property of the "Maiyabala," by directing the man's spear
and giving strength to his throw, being regarded as the actual
cause of the killing. The Maiyabala is also worn as a charm, and
is believed to assist the wearer in fighting or in the pursuit of game,
the idea being that the spirit of the dead man reinforces and assists
that of the wearer of this relic.

775 Closely allied to the above are some of the beliefs concerning
the "Mali," or lesser spirits, of men who have been killed. When
a man has killed another it is believed that the "Mali" of the
slain seeks to enter the person of the slayer, the idea here being
that, by overcoming the man's body, the victor has also overcome
his spirit, which now seeks to serve its new master. Numbers of
men of my acquaintance claim to have passed through this
experience.